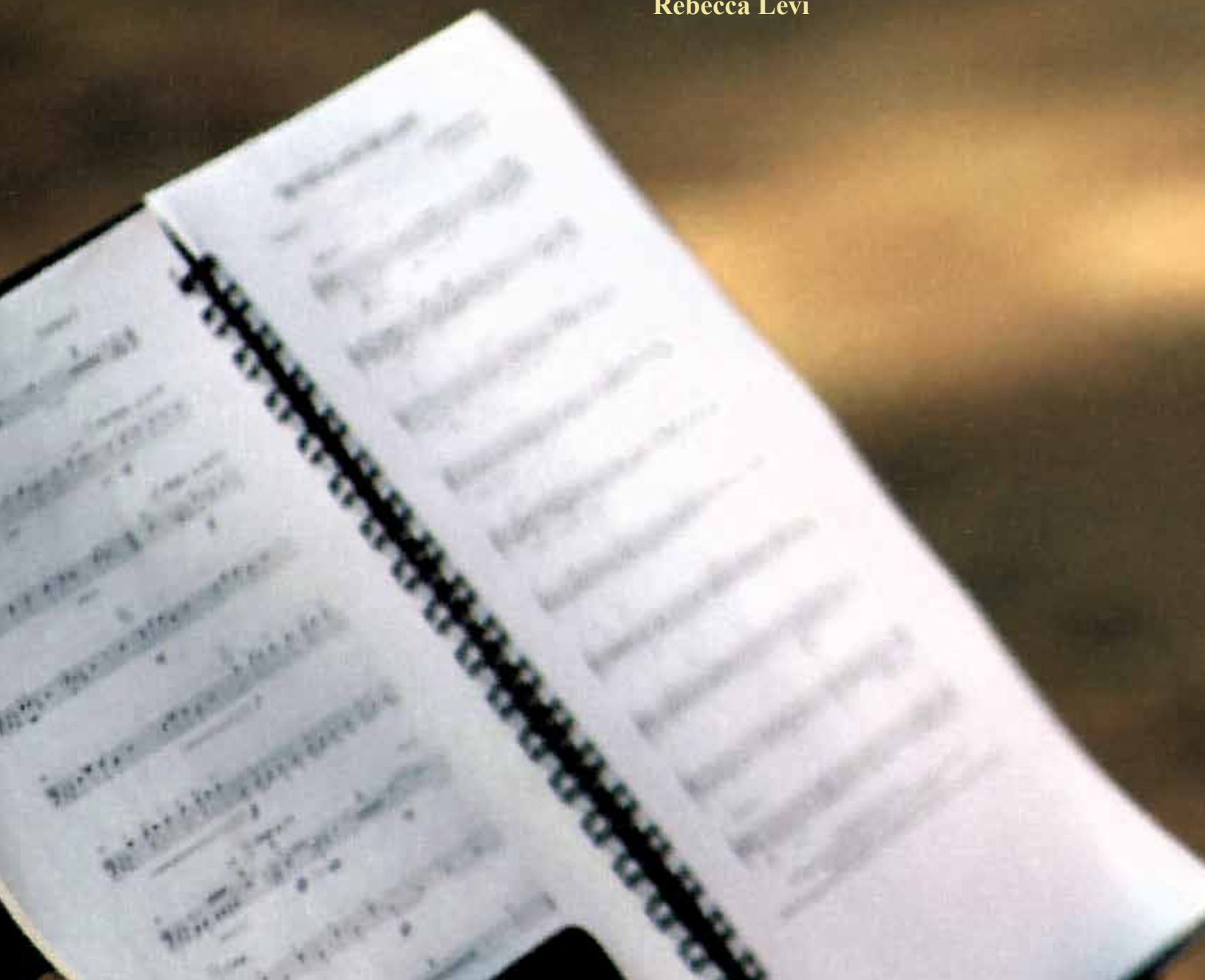


# In Concert: Artistic Approaches to Teacher Education

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**Abstract:** Teaching is an art, and teachers are artists. By examining the key phases in the growth of an artist—practice, technique and theory, and inspiration—we can learn how to better structure teacher education. The article follows the author’s experience and emphasizes experiential learning and structures such as apprenticeship and mentorship. It explores the philosophy of the El Sistema orchestra program in Venezuela and encourages a multi-faceted definition of artists and teachers.

**Key Words:** Abreu; apprenticeship; arts; education; El Sistema; mentorship; music; teachers; team teaching

## En Concierto: Aproximación artística a la formación del profesor

Resumen: La enseñanza es un arte, y los profesores son artistas. Al examinar las fases esenciales en el crecimiento y la formación de un artista –práctica, técnica y teoría, inspiración– podemos descubrir cómo estructurar mejor la formación del profesor. Este artículo recorre la experiencia de su autora, enfatizando el aprendizaje experiencial y estructuras como la que plantean las funciones del aprendiz y el mentor. Explora así la filosofía del programa de orquestas El Sistema en Venezuela, y propugna por una definición multifacética tanto de artistas como de profesores.

Palabras clave: Abreu, aprendizaje (aprendiz), artes, educación, El Sistema, tutoría (mentor), música, profesores, enseñanza colaborativa.

## Em Concerto: Aproximação artística à formação do professor

Resumo: O ensino é uma arte, e os professores são artistas. Ao examinar as fases essenciais no crescimento e a formação dum artista –prática, técnica e teoria, inspiração– podemos descobrir como estruturar melhor a formação do professor. Este artigo percorre a experiência da sua autora, fazendo ênfase na aprendizagem experiencial e estruturas como as que propõem o aprendiz e o mentor. Explora assim a filosofia do programa de orquestras El Sistema na Venezuela, e propugna por uma definição versátil e polivalente tanto de artistas como de professores.

Palavras Chave: Abreu, aprendizagem (aprendiz), artes, educação, o Sistema, tutoria (mentor), música, professores, ensino colaborativo.

## A New Instrument

I never imagined I would be an educator. From a young age, I was immersed in the arts: I played classical music seriously, spent many hours in dance class and theater rehearsals, and studied literature at university. Working with children never occurred to me; I was an artist, not a teacher, and I did not think education could be intellectually or creatively stimulating. After graduation, seeking new experiences, I moved to Peru for a short period of time to volunteer at Mosoq Runa, a home for at-risk children and teenagers. What I found there kept me in the country for two years instead of two months and altered the course of my life. I learned the intricacies of working with young people who have grown up in challenging circumstances; it was a new, fascinating universe, one that was difficult and without a doubt intellectually stimulating. In that setting, I began teaching music classes, and I reveled in the creative process of planning lessons, the thrill of improvising, and the excitement of sharing something that was important to me. I had found my new instrument.

It was then that I recognized teaching as an art, with its complexity, ever-changing nature, and dependence on creators and performers. Teaching contains the intellectual and creative stimulation of writing a novel or composing a symphony, hardly the stifling, oversimplified environment my eighteen-year-old self had imagined.

If teaching is an art, then teachers are artists. There are many ways to be an artist and many different types of training, from conservatories to universities to private lessons to autodidactic experiences. Although institutions would like to say otherwise, there is no “correct” way to become a musician, actor, painter, writer or dancer. Similarly, there is no single path for teachers; each must find a way to learn the art of teaching that feels personally authentic. For this reason, teacher education must accommodate individual paths.

In spite of the infinite possibilities, there are common experiences and common tools needed by growing teachers, and they are worth exploring to develop strategies for teacher education. I see three main areas of development for all artists of all disciplines: practice, technique and theory, and inspiration. Translated into teacher terms: experience, didactics and pedagogy, and teaching philosophy. If we examine the importance of each of these three areas and mine the knowledge we have about how artists grow and how children (and adults) best learn, we can refine the education of teachers and create environments in which they will revel in their art.



## Experience First

As with all complex processes, art requires a substantial amount of technique. In outdated hierarchies of learning, students are made to believe that their education must be frontloaded with technique, that they are musicians-in-training, sculptors-to-be. In other words, that one must play X number of scales before joining an orchestra, or that one must copy X number of masterpieces before creating an original work. This concept not only destroys student motivation, it works against modern educational theories about how people learn best. Technique is vitally important, but it must be imbedded in the context of practice (could I have learned the flute from a textbook?) and cannot be the primary entry point to the art itself. In order to counteract the deadening effect of too much technique too quickly, educators can keep two ideas in mind:

1. There is no such thing as an artist-in-training. From the moment a child or adult engages in the act of making art, he or she is an artist, beginning along the same path walked by Martha Argerich, Frida Kahlo, and Gabriel García Márquez. Adopting this credo fundamentally changes the way the teacher treats the student and thus how the student feels and performs.
2. Experience first, intellectualize later. This key strategy for improving student engagement means that learners need to approach and interact with new material with a certain amount of independence before the teacher presents and analyzes the new concepts. For example, all teachers know that beginning lessons with a long speech about the new concepts of the day loses the attention of the entire class. If, however, instructions are as brief as possible, the class experiences the activity planned, and then the teacher debriefs at the end of the lesson, students will be more engaged and take something valuable away from the experience.

In my early childhood music classes, I use singing, movement, and simple percussion instruments as opportunities for free expression by young musicians. This is their entry point; they are proud of the music they make and feel part of a larger community of artists, made up of their teachers and older students. I also teach my instrumental students to play major scales and arpeggios before I introduce the theory behind them. Later, when the students recognize a major scale in music theory class, their reaction is "I know this!" as opposed to, "Here's another theoretical concept I have to memorize." Similarly, if a conductor tells a choir with limited experience not to sing sharp or flat, the singers will not know what to do, and the conductor will have wasted precious rehearsal time explaining the theory when the ensemble just needed practice. If the conductor begins rehearsals with simple pitch-matching exercises, however, the singers will experience being in tune, and later the conductor can ask for it verbally.

Teachers, as artists, learn in the same way.

1. There is no such thing as a teacher-in-training. We are teachers from the start, and we keep learning forever.
2. Teachers need to experience new concepts first and intellectualize them later.

This is how I began my education as a teacher. When I arrived at Mosoq Runa, I was thrown into situations that were unfamiliar and confusing to me. I had to help a severely under-motivated ten-year-old with his homework while trying to avoid getting tricked by his cleverly timed tantrums. I had to implement a curfew for a sixteen-year-old who was raised in an environment of abuse in which women were not valued and certainly not obeyed. I had to enforce rules I did not understand and perform a part I felt unprepared to play, but I experienced joy, too; I got to know the children very well and began to make music with them. After a month, my boss, Ada Stevanja, took me aside and explained the family history of each child. "Why didn't you tell me before?" I asked. "Because I didn't want you to have any preconceived notions." After three months, she said, "I see you're really serious about this. Now I'm going to explain to you how I work with the kids and why I've structured the home as I have." I came out of this conversation with a deep, contextualized understanding of Ada's techniques as well as the confidence to consider myself an educator, since I had already dealt with many situations on my own. My time in Peru taught me to trust my instincts, a valuable gift for any artist.

My experience, however, is not typical. During my years in Boston, leading a team of fourteen music teachers in a public elementary school orchestra program, I worked with and supported many new teachers. The most immediately effective educators were those with the most experience teaching; that was a given. The teachers with little experience and no education degree had no tools for survival in the classroom, but they tended to be cheerily optimistic about their new work, free from both preconceptions

about what it means to be a good teacher and exaggerated expectations of their own performance.

The teachers who had little experience but did have an education degree, however, tended to struggle the most at the beginning. While their degrees had given them many materials that were valuable for curriculum development, their effectiveness in the classroom was often no better than those without education degrees. It was confusing; their lesson plans were well organized, they had many ideas in teacher meetings, so what was the issue? I eventually recognized that there was a problem of confidence. After four to six years of studying pedagogy with limited time to actually teach, their experience/intellectualize balance was off-kilter. Weighed down by the burden of too much information, they found it difficult to engage and improvise in the classroom. They constantly sought advice, convinced that they lacked tools, when they just needed to believe in themselves as teachers. In fact, I had limited effectiveness in helping them as a supervisor, but when I taught alongside them as a peer, or better yet, when they taught alongside each other, they slowly built up experience and, thus, confidence. They are now exemplary teachers.

### Apprenticeship, Mentorship and Team Teaching: Building Technique in Context

Teachers cannot “just figure it out” forever. After experience, we must intellectualize; in other words, name, discuss and practice specific didactic techniques and larger pedagogical theories. For artists, too, this is an important step, because every expressive choice we make is built on technique. While scales and still-lives should not be our exclusive diet, mastering them is vital to the full development of our abilities. Creative intention only gets us so far; in order to better ourselves as artists, we need a solid foundation of daily technical practice.

Young artists need technique, too. Unfortunately, teachers do not always have time to address it, particularly in music programs where a lone music teacher instructs forty students for half an hour of music per week. In order to handle this large number, the teacher might have the students learn to play the recorder in small groups while he or she circulates. At the beginning, the young musicians enjoy the novelty of the instruments and the relatively unguided experience of playing them, but after a while, they say they are not interested anymore. This is not due to short attention spans; rather, it is what happens when experience is coupled with too-little technique. The students reach the limit of what they can figure out on their own and then either feel that the instrument is too difficult, become anxious and want to quit, or fail to see that there is more to learn, become bored and want to quit. Either way, they become disengaged. (The only children who do not are likely very self-motivated and seek out the technique on their own, on YouTube.)

When music teachers have enough time and resources, however, students of all ages can successfully learn complex technique. In Boston, my teachers and I introduce rest position and instrument care to four-year-olds using simple percussion instruments, and by the time they are six they form a string orchestra. This is possible due to a healthy balance between experience and technique and, more importantly, the weaving

of technique into the experience itself. In other words, we do not withhold the instruments until students have demonstrated full understanding of bow holds—they would lose their motivation—but we also do not let them loose on the violins and cellos—they would become disengaged eventually (and would break the instruments). One tool we use to secretly embed technique is the Paper Orchestra. Students and families build a string orchestra out of cardboard and papier-mâché, so students can “play” for six weeks before graduating to real instruments. For the students, the significance lies in the pride of creation, for the parents, in the family bonding and community building, and for the teachers, in the opportunity to teach technique. Embedding technique in emotionally and creatively fulfilling experiences is challenging, but it remains an essential part of the artistic education process.

Likewise, new teachers need technique to be woven into their experiences so that they learn key ideas in context. This is the best way to guarantee that these concepts will be digested and applied. How can brand new teachers understand the importance of classroom management if they have never faced a group of thirty ten-year-olds? They may try to memorize the techniques intellectually, but they will not prioritize them in their minds or absorb them into their actions if they have not lived the experience. Most education programs recognize this, so they send their new teachers into schools for experience, but there is still a disconnect between the classroom where the teacher learns and the classroom where the teacher teaches. For this reason, we must examine teacher education models that combine these two spaces, such as apprenticeship, mentorship and team teaching.

## I. Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship, traditionally used in professions considered crafts, such as carpentry, woodworking or shipbuilding, describes how a new craftsman learns alongside a master craftsman in the context of his or her work. This method has been used for centuries in these professions because one cannot learn to build a ship without building a ship. All complex activities are best learned in context, however, where pure experience and rigorous technique can co-exist. For musicians, the apprenticeship model is already rooted in our culture, even if we do not use the term. Our private lessons are with master teachers who play with us and for us; we spend our time together slowly building the ship.

In fact, the best student teaching programs look like apprenticeships. In my school in Boston, new classroom teachers worked with master classroom teachers, instructing alongside them for an entire year. This program often formed the most significant part of the student teacher’s education degree. I witnessed the transformation of young teachers from neophytes to masters themselves, when the following conditions were in place:

1. The “master teacher” was both highly skilled and interested in her own growth. Our most exemplary teachers are the ones most committed to their own learning, and all of this rubs off on the “apprentice.”
2. The master teacher was actively invested in the education of her apprentice. If the student teacher spends more time making copies than teaching, the process does not work.

After my first apprenticeship at Mosoq Runa with Ada, which was focused on educating outside the classroom and working with at-risk populations, I found my next master educator, a woman who made a permanent mark on the way I approach the art of teaching. Lorrie Heagy is a music teacher who has been practicing her art for almost two decades. Together, we spent a year studying El Sistema, the world-renowned orchestra network in Venezuela, and brainstorming ways to bring the program to the United States. Throughout the fellowship, Lorrie and I discussed many ideas about classroom management and promoting student engagement; she knew much more than I did but was still open to learning from me.

When we started teaching together, however, the apprenticeship really began. We led classes for children and teenagers and workshops for teachers all over Venezuela. I was both her co-teacher and translator, and it was the perfect way to absorb her techniques. We planned lessons together, and then, during the class, I would observe her closely and repeat everything she said (in Spanish), thus digesting the concepts and taking equal responsibility for the activities.

Sometimes, the techniques I absorbed were ones Lorrie had explained to me beforehand. For example, she teaches teachers about neurologically motivated instruction strategies that promote engagement. Lorrie would explain “crossing the midline” to help with focus, the importance of movement in memorization and lesson flow, and the power of routine in preparing the brain to receive new information. Then, we would apply these concepts directly in the class. I became so comfortable with these topics that, four years later, I still not only use them with students but also pass them on to others when I lead teacher-training workshops.

At other times, the experience felt as natural as osmosis, as some techniques I internalized were ones Lorrie had not explained to me. I noticed the positive tone of her voice, the strong manner in

which she held herself, and the non-verbal ways she introduced new activities. These techniques were as fundamental as the big ideas about brain-compatible teaching. Of course, when I asked her about them, she would explain: "That's positive reinforcement." "Credible stance." "Experience first, intellectualize later."

The apprenticeship model has formed the center of my education as a teacher. When I speak with teachers who have been trained in traditional education programs, they almost always cite their student teaching experience alongside a master teacher as being the most effective and important part of their educational trajectory. Moving forward, we need to recognize the effectiveness and centrality of apprenticeships and give them the space, time, resources and priority they deserve.

## II. Mentorship

Alongside the central experience of apprenticeship, mentors play an invaluable supporting role in the development of new teachers. While master teachers coach their apprentices in the context of the work itself, they mentor other teachers by observing their work and discussing it with them, creating a productive feedback loop for educators both new and experienced. Mentorship also exists in the arts in master classes, in which a master performer listens to students play their instruments, then gives feedback and demonstrates ways to improve. In teaching, mentorship usually follows a few simple steps that can take a week or a year:

1. Initial observation. The mentor silently watches without becoming involved.
2. Debrief discussion. The mentor begins by asking the mentee to reflect on the lesson and then proceeds with his or her observations, focusing on big ideas and key points.
3. Further observations and debriefs. The mentor sometimes demonstrates concepts during the observations by co-teaching.

While it was my job, as a supervisor, to support my music teachers in this way, many more mentorship opportunities cropped up informally throughout the school. Whether due to my own initiative or to the inspired thinking of my music team and non-musician colleagues, cross-discipline partnerships began to grow. The experienced classroom teachers of the school (the same ones who acted as master teachers to their own apprentices) started to mentor my music teachers. This proved highly effective, because the classroom teachers

brought knowledge and strategies into the music department that we had not yet encountered. Classroom teachers use many educational tools that are absent from (or under-emphasized in) arts education courses. For example, classroom teachers spend the first month of school setting up community routines and norms with many inventive activities, before even attempting to teach academic material. We music teachers do not do that. Classroom teachers lead frequent discussions with their students. In performance-based music classes, class conversations are not prioritized but are often very useful. Although we had to adapt the classroom teacher tools to our musical needs, this treasure trove of information proved extremely valuable to my teachers. Furthermore, classroom teachers are helpful with classroom management and have a strong grasp of the developmental needs of the age group they instruct.

For students, this cross-disciplinary teacher support is also beneficial, because the classroom teacher brings in knowledge of a child's background or non-musical abilities that can improve the music teacher's capacity to connect to that child. The combined efforts of the teachers also create cross-disciplinary links that help children make connections between subjects, thus synchronizing their learning and enhancing their cognitive development. Mentorship, valuable to all members of the community, provides a tool of lifelong learning to teachers, as long as institutions support and encourage the activity.

## III. Team Teaching

Both apprenticeship and mentorship rely on the practice of team teaching, which means leading classes in small groups, usually in pairs. Team teaching is an intricate dance, well choreographed to make sure that each teacher understands his or her role. Sometimes these roles are split by time (one teacher leads the opening exercise, then the other takes over), sometimes by theme (one teacher addresses the string instruments, the other the winds), and sometimes by type of instruction (one teacher leads from front of the class while the other moves around the room, silently supporting individual students).

While team teaching is a valuable strategy for masters working with apprentices and mentees, it is also an important experience to share with a peer. In other words, two teachers who are in an equal relationship and have roughly the same amount of experience can learn a great deal by teaching together. In an atmosphere free of evaluation and judgment, with the ability to both act and observe, two peers can share their different strengths and further develop their technique. Co-planning sessions and debriefs are vital in order to ensure that both teachers are on the

same page and that each has the chance to give the other feedback.

For artists, team teaching resembles small ensemble rehearsals without a conductor, director or master artist. Just as chamber music is considered a key process in the development of musicians, team teaching with peers can help new educators grow in ways that no other support system can.

## A Note About Pedagogy

So far, when talking about technique, I have focused mostly on didactics (direct teaching strategies) rather than pedagogy (theories about education), but I see both as being part of the same process. When Lorrie Heagy taught me about brain-compatible teaching strategies, she recommended a book, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, by Eric Jensen. While filled with information instantly applicable in the classroom, this is a work of pedagogical literature. Other wonderful books I have read on art, education, and theories about them—such as *Art as Experience* by John Dewey and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire—helped me because I read them while I was working as a teacher; they were contextualized by my experience. In Boston, we read pedagogical texts as a faculty and discussed them during professional development days. My experience has been that reading about educational theories has a greater effect on new teachers when combined with apprenticeship, mentorship and team teaching. As technique must be balanced with experience, the intellectual and academic study of teaching needs to be embedded in the practice of that art.

## Inspiration: Creating a Teaching Philosophy

After gaining experience and technique, a teacher's education may seem complete, but a third and equally important piece of the puzzle is the development of a teaching philosophy. Though this may sound like an activity for an afternoon of professional development, I believe that the slow building of a teaching philosophy is the work of a lifetime that heavily influences the choices teachers make about where to teach, whom to teach and how to teach. No one copies their master teacher forever; we are a patchwork of our many influences, and it is up to each of us to stitch them together in a way that feels authentic. Our teaching philosophy is the North Star that guides and motivates us through many years of teaching.

My teaching philosophy was born at Mosoq Runa, but it was my experience with El Sistema that gave

me a strong foundation. During my year of studying El Sistema, I was immersed in an artistic, educational and social program I admired, and my cohort and I spent months discovering and articulating the tenets of its philosophy. El Sistema is a network of youth and children's orchestras and choirs that involves half a million young people in Venezuela. It was founded in 1975 by Dr. José Antonio Abreu—pianist, conductor and economist—who famously promised eleven young people in a garage that they would become the best orchestra in the world. Funded by the government as a social program, El Sistema now boasts several world-touring orchestras who receive standing ovations wherever they go, as well as many world-class musicians, the most famous of whom is the conductor Gustavo Dudamel. Many of us believed that there must be some pedagogical secret to mass-producing great orchestral musicians, but what we found was far more significant, both for the worldwide El Sistema movement and for me personally: El Sistema has survived and thrived because of its powerful philosophy.

The philosophical tenets of El Sistema both showed me how to grow as an educator and voiced ideas I already had within me but had not yet expressed. Some of its beliefs even radically shift norms for all artists, teachers included, and can and should inform how we educate new generations of teachers.

## 1. Social Inclusion AND Musical Excellence

This is the heart of El Sistema; it is not a social program that does music nor a music program with social goals. Its musical and social objectives are two sides of the same coin and are given equal importance. Dr. Abreu has defined El Sistema as “a program of social rescue and profound social transformation,” but the social work happens in an environment of musical excellence, and if the music were not excellent, the social transformation would not be profound. (Abreu, 2009) Dr. Abreu cites Mother Teresa as saying that “the most miserable and tragic thing about poverty is not the lack of bread or roof. It is feeling like nobody, being nobody.” (Abreu, 2009) Complex music, he says, gives one an “affluence of spirit,” jointly created by the emotions and intellect accessed through performance as well as the joy and sense of belonging cultivated by inclusion in a positive, productive group of people such as a musical ensemble.

These joint goals of El Sistema marry my desire to work with underserved populations with my aspiration to teach musical excellence. I believe that all children deserve access to high-quality music education without audition, and this influences where I teach, whom I teach and how I teach.



## 2. Orchestra as a Model Society

Dr. Abreu has said that “the orchestra is the one community that comes together for the sole purpose of agreeing with itself.” In an orchestra, musicians learn to be in tune, both literally and figuratively: we listen to our neighbors, we think before we “speak,” and each of us has a unique instrument, or voice. This experience exists not only in orchestras, but in all musical ensembles, from folkloric joropo groups to jazz bands.

In an age in which our style of life and the technology we use create more opportunities for individualism than community, the human connection that occurs within an ensemble is essential. In my classes, I have taught young children who have already developed extraordinarily antisocial behavior; I shudder to think what a four-year-old who holds his classmate’s hand on a radiator will be doing in ten or twenty years. Among many solutions to violence, positive social development in a group dedicated to creating beauty—from orchestras to dance troupes—can alter the paths of many young people. As a teacher, I am committed to that effort.

## 3. Intensity and High Expectations

In Venezuela, young musicians in El Sistema rehearse constantly, spending up to five hours per day, six days per week at their núcleo. This is a key piece of the El Sistema model for both practical and philosophical reasons. First of all, it is the only way to fulfill the competing ideals of social inclusion and musical excellence. If the orchestra is the primary place where young people learn their musical skills, they need frequent rehearsals. Second, El Sistema teachers believe that there is no such thing as a musician-in-training. As Israel Millan, a teacher from Caracas, said to Lorrie and me: “Never place limits on what a child can do. He is a musician from the start.” For this reason, El Sistema’s young musicians rehearse intensively and perform frequently.

I feel angered when people lower their expectations for certain students because of their background or age. Of course, developmental limits exist, but often people use the word “talented” to label a child who has simply had more time and support with an instrument. In Boston, teaching in a school where children get two to three hours of music education per day, I have discovered that everyone can play and sing, even those traditionally labeled as “tone-deaf.” For this reason, I do not like to teach music in once-a-week programs, because only some of the students experience success, often those with emotional, intellectual and artistic support at home.

## 4. Continuity

In El Sistema, there is room for all ages and levels, so students do not experience a break in their musical education. Multi-year curricula and repertoire progressions are shared across the network, so even if a child moves, he or she does not fall behind.

We know that instability and lack of continuity are hallmarks of homes made chaotic by poverty, violence, or both. We also know that routine reduces stress and creates a space safe for learning. Routine

over time is continuity. For this reason, I seek out projects that have a strong foothold and a plan to exist for a long time, so that my teaching can act as a helpful element in a long, continuous educational experience.

## 5. Inclusion of Family and Community

In El Sistema, the núcleos are in the neighborhoods where the students live, and the space belongs to the community. One often sees family members chatting in the halls, waiting for their children. Concerts have taken place on the streets of these neighborhoods, and this has raised the self-esteem of communities infamous for their violence.

Mosoq Runa is also located in the neighborhood most of its families call home. Ada maintains a close connection with all parents, and the majority take their children home on Sundays. Although this certainly makes the educator’s job more complicated, not acknowledging or, worse, denying young people access to their families does nothing to help them heal their scars. (Of course, there are cases where the physical safety of the child is at risk, and these necessitate exceptions.) The more a child’s family is productively included in his or her education, the more supported and motivated that child will be. Furthermore, as co-educators of their own children, family members can be key allies to teachers. For the students’ sake, for the parents’ sake, and for my own sake, family inclusion remains an important piece of my teaching philosophy.

## 6. Teach the Whole Child

Though embedded in the other philosophical principles, this practice merits independent consideration. When we teach music or art or dance or theatre or writing, we are key participants in the lifelong education and growth of our pupils. I feel the responsibility as a teacher of the arts to educate myself about my students as individuals and to work as a team member with the other adults in their lives to encourage their full, healthy and positive development. In Boston, I eventually realized that this also applied to my faculty. When educating teachers, we must remember that they too are complex individuals, and we are responsible for them.

The complexity of individuals brings me to the final philosophical tenet of El Sistema, one that expresses a radical idea held by many great minds in the arts.

## 7. Teachers are Artists; Artists are Teachers; All are Citizens

When my colleagues and I arrived at the El Sistema núcleo in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, at nine a.m. on a Monday, we were surprised to find the administrative offices empty. As we wandered around, looking for people, we heard the strains of an orchestra. We eventually stumbled into a rehearsal of Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, where all



the núcleo teachers, administrators and directors were playing their instruments. In El Sistema, teachers continue to be practicing musicians, playing in an orchestra every morning as a part of their job.

The point was clear: all teachers are artists. This means two things: one, that teaching is considered an art and thus given social value, and two, that teachers must be supported in their growth as artists. El Sistema funds orchestras of teachers because it is an organization founded and run by musicians, who know that if one cuts a music teacher off from music, the teacher suffers, the students suffer, and the music suffers.

The other side of this belief is that all artists are teachers. This is evinced in El Sistema through the practice of peer teaching, in which young musicians teach other young musicians. This practice both supports the idea of never placing limits on children and fundamentally questions educational hierarchies that automatically privilege advanced age and training.

More experienced musicians become teachers too, as they begin conducting and teaching young orchestras as teenagers. Even the famous Gustavo Dudamel comes home to Venezuela to work with the new top youth orchestras. Here, citizenship comes into focus: artists teach not only because it is interesting and stimulating, but also because it is their responsibility to their communities. Dudamel is not the only world-famous musician known for giving back in this way: Yo-Yo Ma, Simon Rattle, Shakira, and many others have led by example, through both their sponsorship of educational organizations and their direct work with young people.

Every artist is a unique individual trained in a unique way, but together we form an orchestra, an interdependent group of people that includes two-year-olds shaking maracas. The more we teach and learn from each other, the better our orchestra will sound. The more practice we have at accessing many, varied parts of our identities and using them to connect with others, the greater our chance of breaking cycles of disconnection and violence like those Ada confronts in Peru. These processes live at the heart of what it means to be a good citizen.

## Inspiration in Professional Development

Just as we teach our new teachers about technique and give them experiences for its application, we also have the responsibility to pass on our philosophies. When my colleague David Malek and I founded the music program in Boston, named for El Sistema, we felt that weight: How could we show our teachers what El Sistema was and what we believed in? Our strategies fell into three categories:

Philosophy 100: Show a video on El Sistema, explain the philosophical tenets, and hand out supporting texts.

Philosophy 200: Lead an interactive discussion of the philosophical principles with opportunities for new teachers to develop ideas and give feedback.

Philosophy 300: Live the philosophy and immerse the faculty in it. Team-teach alongside new teachers and show them what

it means to have high expectations, teach the whole child, and include the families. Create opportunities for teachers to play together as a part of their work.

Once David and I started to teach Philosophy 300, our teachers caught on quickly. They started organizing their own chamber music groups and initiated many peer-teaching experiences for our students. They helped us train new teachers as they arrived at the school each year. This taught me an invaluable lesson. Effective teacher education does not thrive in a hierarchy; it flourishes when we trust new teachers to grow as a team.

## Tip of the Iceberg

In a January 2014 article, Yo-Yo Ma wrote:

We live in such a measuring society, people tend to put a person in a box they can put on their mental shelf. People think of me as a cellist because they can see my performances and take my measure as a musician. I think of my life as a musician as only the tip of an iceberg. That is only the audible part of my existence. Underneath the water is the life I'm leading, the thoughts I'm thinking and the emotions that well up in me. (Ma, 2014)

We have all felt the restraints of this box. Choose a career. Choose an instrument. Just pick one path. Yet the reality is that we—as artists, teachers and human beings—exist in multiplicity. We cannot choose without shutting part of ourselves off, and a streamlined artist is not a very interesting one. This problem exceeds the bounds of the arts and teacher education. But perhaps, as we make decisions about how we want to learn and teach, we can strive to preserve the full icebergs of our identity, encourage complex, non-streamlined development in our students, and help a new generation of teachers go forth as full, growing artists.

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